

Andrew Sorg
Sandpoint, ID

Honorable Senator Winder
Co-Chairman
Federal Lands Interim Committee
Idaho State Senate
Boise, Idaho 83702

Honorable Representative Denney
Co-Chairman
Federal Lands Interim Committee
Idaho State House
Boise, Idaho 83702

Honorable Senator Winder, Honorable Representative Denney, and with regards to our own Senator Keough, I would like to begin by thanking the Federal Lands Interim Committee for coming to Sandpoint and listening to the opinions of everyday Idahoans like myself.

Good afternoon! My name is Andrew Sorg, and I am here today to express the need for caution and cooperation with the Federal Government with regards to its control of public lands. I believe the "go-it-alone" approach that others are advocating will not only cause increased costs to the present management budget for our regulated state lands but could also prove to be unmanageable by causing further damage to our ecosystem through the spread of invasive species that we cannot control alone.

The continued existence of the Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) is one of the reasons — and an important reason — that this Interim Committee was formed. The grouse habitat in the Great Basin has slowly declined through the decades due to two primary factors: Wildfires and Invasive species. These two factors go hand in hand. When invasive plant species spread across the terrain it becomes more susceptible to wildfires. "Historically, the Great Basin burned in smaller, patchier conflagrations, at intervals on the order of once per century. Managers are now seeing sagebrush country burn every 20 years in parts of the Great Basin, fueled by drought and vigorous non-natives like cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*)."¹ To make matters worse, the areas of the Great Basin that have been exposed to wildfires have been resistant to returning to their native state.

While much of the reason the Sage Grouse is being considered as an endangered species is due to this loss of habitat, Idaho should see this loss of habitat as a threat to us as well. Even with the current management plan, we may be heading into an Alternative Stable State for the ecosystem of Southern Idaho where wildfires become commonplace and rangeland becomes useless to Ranchers and their livestock. The blow to the budget and the economy of Idaho would be catastrophic. Federal assistance to combat invasive species is necessary to slow this event from happening. Every year that we protect natural habitat is money saved for Idaho. While the Sage Grouse is a perfect example, this same story exists here in the Panhandle of Idaho where we combat the constant threats invasive species have on our lakes and forests.

Using most recent data, the noxious weed management cost in Idaho is approximately \$7 - \$10 million annually with \$5.7M coming directly from BLM and USFS Federal Grants either given as direct payments or added to the weed-cost share fund.² This means that between 57% to over 80% of our invasive species budget comes from the federal government. If Idaho plans on taking over management of our public lands in a "go-it-alone" approach we risk losing it all.

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As previously shown in the March 14th meeting, Idaho has examples in our recent past where collaborative efforts with Federal law has created successes for Idaho. We should not spend our money battling in courts when we could be using our time negotiating with all prospective stakeholders and creating another success story for both the Sage Grouse and the Great State of Idaho.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert Long", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

- 1) "Sage grouse losing habitat to fire as endangered species decision looms" <http://www.esa.org/esablog/research/sage-grouse-losing-habitat-to-fire-as-endangered-species-decision-looms/>
- 2) "Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission -A comparative analysis of state programs and funding for terrestrial invasive plant control" <http://www.naisn.org/StateInvasiveFunding2013.pdf>